



National Year of Reading 2012

THE NATIONAL YEAR OF READING

2012 will see a whole heap of amazing, fun, reading activities taking place around Australia and online, so people of all ages, from different backgrounds, can discover and rediscover the joy of reading.

If your parents read to you when you were very young; if you learnt to read at an early age; if you went to a good school, where reading for pleasure was encouraged, and if you were inspired by the people around you to keep reading as a young adult, then the word on the page (or the screen) will be part of your DNA.

But that's not the case for 46% of the population.

Nearly half the population struggles without the literacy skills to meet the most basic demands of everyday life and work. There are 46% of Australians who can't read newspapers; follow a recipe; make sense of timetables, or understand the instructions on a medicine bottle.

Australian libraries and library associations are behind a campaign to turn 2012 into the National Year of Reading, linking together all the great things that are already happening around books, reading and literacy, and giving them an extra boost, with inspirational programs and events taking place across the country.

Libraries will be partnering with government, the media, writers, schools, publishers, booksellers, employers, child care providers, health professionals and a whole host of other organisations that share our passion for reading.

The UK's National Year of Reading in 2008 was 'successful in starting to shift attitudes to and behaviours around reading with specific target audiences':

- 6,000 National Year of Reading events registered on the website
- 2.3 million new public library members
- 12% more children from lower socio-economic groups becoming library members and 5% more parents from these groups saying they read with their children every day (20% compared with 15%)
- 23,000 more boys taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge

We are following a similar path of fun, consumer-facing reading activities, underpinned by evidence, impact and sustainable practice.



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The National Year of Reading 2012 will help Australians increase their reading confidence, literacy, IT literacy, vocabulary and general knowledge.

- There will be adult stories available as 'free reads' for people who haven't developed strong literacy skills and are keen to do so, but find themselves without age-appropriate reading matter.
- Our message will be that it doesn't matter what you read – romance and adventure are just as relevant as a classic novel. Everyone can start their reading journey with content that they find interesting and engaging. It doesn't have to be Shakespeare.
- The story can be in any format – books, e-books, novellas, magazines, screen games. And it doesn't have to be a story. Non-fiction is fine too, and then there's poetry, graphic novels, newspapers, song lyrics.

Vision and strategy for Australia

The National Year of Reading 2012 is about children learning to read and keen readers finding new sources of inspiration. It's about supporting reading initiatives while respecting the oral tradition of storytelling. It's about helping people discover and rediscover the magic of books. And most of all, it's about Australians becoming a nation of readers.

Nearly half our population can't read with any fluency. It's a shameful and worrying statistic. So what are the strategies to turn Australia into a nation of readers and encourage a reading culture in every home?

Strategy 1: Belief in the positive power of reading

There is a massive amount of evidence – scientific, evidence-based and anecdotal – to show that reading for pleasure is good for us. Beyond literacy, it contributes to our personal well-being, health, social and economic outcomes. It even helps with our vocabulary and attention-span.

Reading builds relationships in families, with others, and increases our understanding of ourselves and who we are in relation to others.

Library staff, teachers and other professionals are well-versed in the benefits but there is not the same depth of understanding in the wider community. The National Year of Reading provides the opportunity to change attitudes and behaviours, and embed a reading culture to benefit current and future generations.



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Strategy 2: Accessibility and inspiration

Maybe you can't read; English isn't your first language, or you've just never got into books. The National Year of Reading will give people a taste of what's out there, in an easily digestible form – not weighty tomes, but novellas, magazine articles, audio books, e-zines and short stories; across many different genres; covering diverse cultural perspectives, and in some cases in languages other than English.

The National Year of Reading will also appeal to book lovers. We want people who read to try new things and to become advocates for reading with their peers.

Strategy 3: Good government policy and practice

The National Year of Reading will give all three levels of government – local, state/territory and federal – the opportunity to showcase best practice from family literacy initiatives through to reading therapy for people in aged care facilities.

This campaign provides the opportunity to create a new level of cross-government, cross-council involvement in literacy, which can continue far beyond 31 December 2012.

Strategy 4: A joined up approach

Australia has a fantastic line-up of reading champions; advocates, event, campaign and program organisers. The National Year of Reading is a way of linking all the good things that are already happening and adding a little extra something to the mix.

Family literacy is a key target for the National Year of Reading. By giving parents and caregivers the confidence and skills to share books with their children – whether or not they themselves are readers – we can help to break the cycle of disadvantage.

A recent study based on data from 27 countries, including Australia, found that having books in the home greatly enhanced children's educational achievements and this factor had a greater impact on children from the most disadvantaged families. It was where books were scarce that each additional book mattered most.

Partnerships and programs

The National Year of Reading 2012 is very much a collaborative activity. We have begun the process of engagement, but the next 18 months will see many more partnerships formed.



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The founders and financial partners are:

- Australian Library and Information Association
- ACT Library and Information Service
- Northern Territory Library
- Public Libraries Australia
- Public Libraries New South Wales (Country)
- Public Libraries South Australia
- Public Libraries Victoria Network
- Public Libraries Western Australia
- State Library of Queensland
- State Library of Tasmania
- State Library of Victoria
- State Library of South Australia
- State Library of Western Australia

Supporters include the National Library of Australia; Australian School Library Association; Public Libraries New South Wales (Metropolitan); School Library Association of Victoria.

The National Year of Reading has been prompted by libraries, but its success depends on wide-ranging partnerships. Early discussions have taken place with:

- ABC
- Australia Council for the Arts
- Australian Booksellers Association
- Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation
- Australian Publishers Association
- APA Children's Publishing Committee
- Australian Speech Pathology Association
- Australian Society of Authors
- Centenary of Canberra
- Central Queensland University
- Children's Book Council of Australia
- Get Reading
- Indigenous Literacy Project
- Little Big Book Club
- Publishers – Hachette, Scholastic, Penguin, Walker Books,
- Pyjama Foundation
- SBS
- The Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas
- Vision Australia
- Writers Centres (Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia)

And there are more meetings to follow.



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While much of the activity will happen through partners and at a local level, we will be running three national campaigns.

Campaign 1: Public library membership drive

We will run a nationwide membership campaign, using the National Year of Reading to attract people into libraries and to support family literacy initiatives.

Campaign 2: One Country Reading

Several cities have adopted the One Book One City approach – Edinburgh with *Kidnapped* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; Chicago with *To Kill a Mocking Bird*; Dublin, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Brisbane, *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies*.

We are basing our multi-tiered version of the program around a much-loved Australian children's book, Alison Lester's *Are We There Yet?* We will develop this theme of travel and places for a junior, young adult and adult audience, using a variety of different media.

Campaign 3: My story

We will be working with major employers to create writer-in-residence programs, with published outputs. There will be writing workshops for employees who want to develop their creative skills, and for those who struggle with reading and writing but welcome the opportunity to tell their story with the help of an author or illustrator.

Be part of it

The National Year of Reading 2012 is rapidly gathering momentum. It has already captured the imagination of the library and book world; there is the prospect of major media partnerships, and high profile ambassadors are being approached to put their names to the initiative.

The public launch of the National Year of Reading will be on Tuesday 14 February, 2012. The countdown has already begun.

If you believe in the value of a reading nation, become a partner now.

Contact your local library, visit the website www.love2read.org.au or email donna@thelibraryagency.org.au for more information.

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